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Training and research

United Nations Staff College project

Report of the Secretary-General*

1. In its resolution 54/228 of 22 December 1999, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to consult with the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the relevant United Nations organizations and to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, a report on the United Nations Staff College, based on a full and independent evaluation of the implementation and the completion of the activities undertaken by the College, incorporating the College's corporate plan and programme of action, and including recommendations on the future status, funding and operations of the College after the conclusion of its pilot phase in December 2000.

2. Pursuant to the above-mentioned request, the Secretary-General established an independent evaluation team which consulted extensively with senior officials of the United Nations and its funds and programmes, the specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as with donors to the Staff College.

3. In its report, which is contained in the addendum to the present report, the evaluation team provides background information on the launch, in 1995, of the United Nations Staff College as a United Nations project administered by the International Labour Organization, and on the needs analysis conducted during the period from October 1998 to March 1999, leading to the first United Nations Staff College corporate plan[1] and the issuance of the Staff College new programme outline for 1999-2000. Section I of the report of the evaluation team offers an assessment of the activities of the Staff College, focusing on the relevance, quality and impact of the training and learning programmes and workshops conducted by the College; directions as to its future role or roles; relationships with other training institutions; methodologies to create maximum impact in addressing new cross-sectoral challenges; future status and functioning; and governance requirements. The assessment reflects accomplishments and the areas of performance that require strengthening, and outlines the issues raised by the clients of the College about the focus and quality of its programmes. The team concluded that the assessment gave a positive basis for the continuation of the College, particularly in the light of the growing demand for its services (A/55/369/Add.1, para. 85). In section II of its report, the team puts forward a number of proposals on approaches to the institutionalization of the College and on its future role.

4. The Secretary-General shares the key conclusion of the evaluation team that "the time has come to set up a United Nations System Staff College on a permanent basis and recommends accordingly" (A/55/369/Add.1,

* In accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/248, sect. C, para. 1, this report is submitted on 24 October 2000 so as to reflect the outcome of inter-agency consultations on the report of the independent evaluation team on the future of the United Nations Staff College (A/55/369/Add.1) which was received in August.

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para. 86). Not only have, as the evaluation team indicates, "the expectations which accompanied the establishment of the Staff College five years ago — the general perception of its potential to the United Nations system through the building up of a truly global civil service with shared values and ethics, shared commitment and vision and the creation, over time, of a cohesive management culture" not lost their relevance (A/55/369/Add.1, para. 32), they have, at the aftermath of the Millennium Summit, acquired new relevance and a new momentum that should not be lost. In this context, the evaluation team's recommendation to rename the United Nations Staff College the "United Nations System Staff College" is well taken and fully endorsed.

5. Team building across the system is increasingly emerging as a must. As the evaluation team notes, in

> "an environment of rapidly changing political, social, economic and environmental factors, the ability of the United Nations to address issues can no longer depend solely upon trained individuals. Increasingly, it will depend upon corporate ability reflected in the willingness of the various teams of the Organization to be innovative, to speedily learn from past mistakes and to share knowledge of best practice across the system" (A/55/369/Add.1, para. 37).

There is, indeed, as the team remarks, widespread recognition throughout the United Nations family of organizations of the need to accelerate the process of operating as a system, particularly now that the global situation becomes increasingly complex and is rapidly changing. This requires deliberate effort and, sometimes, autonomous interventions at a multitude of levels. The Staff College should play a catalytic role in this direction by focusing on: the quality of the leadership and the people that staff the system; the processes that facilitate learning, knowledge-creation and knowledge-sharing across the system; and the presence of a cohesive, vibrant culture (A/55/369/Add.1, para. 40). The Staff College can obviously be but one instrument to achieve these ends, and its effectiveness in this role will be a function of its capacity to provide relevant, quality services to the United Nations system. At the same time, its institutionalization will introduce a unique, continuing, system-wide instrument exclusively devoted to serving as an agent of change, enabling managers and teams in agencies to sign up to a consistent management culture (A/55/369/Add.1, para. 48 (ii)).

6. The institutionalization of the Staff College should serve to address any of the limitations — either directly or indirectly related to its temporary project status and lack of stable financial arrangements — that have kept the College from realizing its full potential. Chief among those limitations has been the absence of a standing system of inter-agency governance whereby the system's "stakeholders review, approve and provide direction in regard to the overall strategy of the institution, its work programme and its financial requirements" (A/55/369/Add.1, para. 88). This gap, together with the system of funding, as outlined in paragraphs 96 to 102 of the evaluation team's report, has limited the capacity of the College to prioritize its work programme in a way that clearly focuses its distinct contribution within the broad range of capacity-building efforts under way in the various organizations of the system.

7. The institutionalization of the Staff College will also fill a gap in the network of learning and training institutions within the system. The evaluation team notes that the role of the College, as a provider of cross-cutting learning and knowledge services for the United Nations system, differentiates it clearly from the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the United Nations University (UNU). With UNU focusing on research and post-graduate training and on strengthening the capacity of higher education institutions in developing countries, and UNITAR focusing on training and capacity-building for developing countries and the personnel of diplomatic missions to the United Nations, the Staff College, once institutionalized, will fill a distinct niche, focusing on meeting the learning and knowledge-sharing needs of the staff of the United Nations system. This differentiation should not, of course, be pursued in a compartmentalized manner, but in a way that ensures cross-fertilization and mutual reinforcement. All three institutions, within their distinct terms of reference, should be seen as ultimately contributing to maximizing the support that the system provides to Member States; as the evaluation team rightly states, "the best service that the Staff College can render Member States is by helping to ensure that the staff in the system offer services to Member States that are cohesive, well coordinated and responsive to their requirements" (A/55/369/Add.1, para. 39).

8. A decision by the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on the institutionalization of the Staff College, which will make it possible to put in place, by the end of 2001, all necessary institutional arrangements, is also urgent for administrative reasons. With the Staff College project, and the arrangements whereby the International Labour Organization (ILO) provides its administration, coming to an end on 31 December 2000, the United Nations Secretariat considered it prudent to provide for transitional arrangements to facilitate the follow-up to the actions that the General Assembly may decide upon at the current session, and requested ILO to extend current arrangements into 2001. The request was kindly put by the International Labour Office to the Board of the International Training Centre. At a meeting held on 29 March 2000, the officers of the Board unanimously authorized the Director to extend the Staff College project for an additional period of not more than one year, beginning January 2001, under the same terms and conditions agreed upon with the United Nations in the exchange of letters in 1996.

9. In the same context, the Secretary-General concurs with the recommendation of the evaluation team on the administrative framework that would govern the Staff College under its proposed new status. The evaluation team recalled that, in setting up the Staff College as a five-year project administered by ILO and placing it at Turin on the campus of the ILO International Training Centre, the Secretary-General took into account the cross-fertilization and mutual advantage arising from interaction with the Centre, which has a long tradition as a well-established and successful training institution. While the institutionalization of the Staff College will require new administrative arrangements, they should be without prejudice to maintaining a substantive relationship between the two institutions so that they can both continue to benefit fully from it. The new administrative arrangements should, as recommended by the evaluation team, be in line with the distinct legal status to be imparted to the Staff College "while at the same time placing it in a sound and supportive framework of administrative regulations, rules and procedures" (A/55/369/Add.1, para. 105). This implies that, following the transitional phase referred to in paragraph 8 above, the Staff College, as a joint inter-agency entity enjoying a distinct legal status within the United Nations system, would be administered by the United Nations, on behalf of all participating agencies and in accordance with the United Nations Staff and Financial Rules and Regulations.

10. Following the issuance of the report of the evaluation team, consultations were pursued with members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. Wide support was reiterated for the establishment of the United Nations System Staff College and its potential to contribute significantly to overall organizational reform, by strengthening the collective capacity of the system to address cross-sectoral challenges, helping to foster a cohesive management culture across the system, increasing the operational effectiveness of United Nations staff in areas that cut across traditional organizational boundaries, and strengthening partnerships within and beyond the system.

11. While the evaluation team proposes that, following the institutionalization of the Staff College, provision should be made for a three-year phase of consensus-building, leading to the finalization of an operational strategy and funding modalities for the College, inter-agency consultations concluded that a sharper definition of the functions and programme of the College, and agreement on specific modalities of governance and funding, could be arrived at within a much shorter time-frame than envisaged in the report of the evaluation team, and should be reached from the outset of its operations under its new proposed status. Accordingly, an inter-agency working group is being established to carry forward the implementation process, and sharpen and elaborate the future functions and arrangements for governance and funding of the College, building upon the views of the clients of the College on its performance and on the approaches to its functioning proposed by the evaluation team. The group will, in particular, seek to define further the programmatic elements that make up the comparative advantage of the College as a system-wide learning and knowledge management institution, and to specify further both the mechanism and composition of a governance structure that will ensure accountability to, and ownership by, the system, and arrangements for sustainable funding. The group will make detailed recommendations to the Secretary-General early in 2001 on the above-mentioned matters, which will be reflected, as appropriate, in a final version of the draft statutes, to be approved by the Administrative Committee on Coordination and submitted to the General Assembly as early as possible in 2001.

12. The Secretary-General wishes to take this opportunity to reiterate his appreciation to the host country and those countries that have been generously supporting the Staff College and trusts that such support will continue to be forthcoming in the future.

Recommendations

13. The Secretary-General recommends that the General Assembly:

(a) Decide to establish the United Nations System Staff College, effective 1 January 2002, as a system-wide knowledge management and learning institution for the staff of the United Nations system;

(b) Request that a final draft of the statutes of the College, reflecting, as appropriate, the outcome of the further inter-agency consultations referred to in paragraph 11 above, be submitted to it for its review and approval as soon as possible in 2001;

(c) Decide that, thereafter, there should be biennial reporting to the General Assembly, on the work, activities and accomplishments of the College, including its collaboration with other relevant United Nations institutions.

Notes

[1] The exercise led to five criteria for defining priorities for the Staff College programme, namely (a) those related to reform of the United Nations system; (b) provision of added-value and quality; (c) issues considered to be cross-organizational; (d) do few things but do them well; and (e) cost-effectiveness.